

**COLORADO RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM  
FY 2000 ANNUAL PROJECT REPORT  
FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROJECTS**

**Project No.: PIP-3**

- I. Project title: Yampa River Basin Endangered Fish Recovery & Water Management Plan
- II. Public involvement coordinator: Gerry Roehm, Yampa River Coordinator  
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- III. Project summary:

The objectives of the Yampa Plan are to provide water for existing and foreseeable future human needs in the Yampa River Basin and protect instream flows and aquatic habitat necessary to maintain and recover endangered fishes and protect other native fish and wildlife resources in the Yampa River Basin.

The principal objectives of this Public Involvement Plan are to:

- 1. Provide an avenue for effective local involvement in developing the Yampa Plan;
- 2. Enhance the appreciation of the public and key stakeholders for the uniqueness of the Yampa River and the endangered fish;
- 3. Encourage landowners to cooperate in providing access to their lands to conduct fish studies and to implement elements of the Yampa Plan;
- 4. Develop a plan in close coordination with angler groups that addresses how nonnative fish impacts will be addressed while providing recreational fish opportunities;
- 5. Enhance the image of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Recovery Program in the eyes of the public and key stakeholders as a credible entity to facilitate development of the Yampa Plan in a timely and responsible manner;
- 6. Increase support in the water, scientific and environmental community for the Yampa Plan.

Although the objectives of this plan have not changed, in mid-1999 the Recovery Program adopted a different approach to accomplish these objectives for the Yampa. The original strategy was to evaluate a variety of stream flow augmentation strategies within the context of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Ayres Associates was contracted to handle NEPA documentation and public involvement requirements. However, rather than follow the NEPA process, as previously envisioned, the Program decided to follow a programmatic approach similar to the one it was following for the 15-mile reach of the Colorado River. This decision also was prompted, in part, by the

lack of a clear federal action on which to base the NEPA process. Moreover, some viewed the Yampa River Basin as receiving different treatment from other subbasins of the Upper Colorado River, and desired a measure of equity between the subbasins.

Under the programmatic approach, local stakeholders would work with representatives of local, state, and federal agencies and environmental organizations to develop a management plan for the Yampa River. This management plan would serve as the basis for an intra-Service programmatic biological opinion (PBO) for the Basin. The federal action necessitating the PBO would be a Cooperative Agreement between the FWS and the states of Colorado and Wyoming to implement the management plan.

The most significant accomplishments of FY 2000 were the identification and evaluation of alternative actions, completion of a preliminary draft management plan describing those alternatives and a subsequent facilitated conference to achieve a consensus as to a preferred alternative.

IV. Study schedule: FY 1996-2001

V. Relationship to RIPRAP:

Green River Action Plan: Yampa and Little Snake Rivers  
I.A.4.a.(3) Yampa River management plan

General Recovery Program Support Action Plan

VI.C. Plan and implement information and education and public involvement activities for all significant Recovery Program actions.

VI. Accomplishment of FY 2000 objectives and tasks:

Objective: Provide an avenue for effective local involvement in the development of the Yampa Plan.

Task: Enter into an agreement with the Yampa River Basin Partnership whereby the Partnership would agree to: a) provide a public forum and host meetings where issues related to the Yampa Plan can be discussed; b) help disseminate information about the Recovery Program and the Yampa Plan to affected interest groups and stakeholders in the Yampa Basin, including both members and nonmembers of the Partnership; and c) help educate local residents about the Yampa Plan.

The FWS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Partnership in FY 1997. At its July 1999 meeting, the Partnership requested that FWS revise the MOU to reflect the change from a NEPA-oriented process to a PBO approach. The Yampa Coordinator subsequently drafted a new MOU between the FWS and the Partnership and distributed it to the Partnership at its annual meeting in September 1999. A final revised MOU was signed in April 2000. In FY 2000, the Partnership continued to perform its functions as specified by the MOU and outlined above to inform and involve the public in the Yampa planning process through regular monthly, special and annual meetings.

The Partnership sponsored and the Yampa River Coordinator organized a conference held in Craig, Colorado, in August 2000. Representatives of local, state and federal government, agriculture, recreation, power companies, mining, environmental organizations and other stakeholders met to reach a consensus on a proposed action for the Yampa River management plan. A facilitator was hired to help focus the discussion and allow for meaningful participation by everyone in attendance. The conferees were a diverse group, with agriculture (15/48) the largest single economic sector represented. Almost two-thirds (30/48) of the conferees reside in the Yampa River Basin. While we were able to achieve a consensus on most issues, one significant issue – the size of an increment of future depletions on which to consult – remained unresolved as of the end of FY 2000.

Objective: Enhance the appreciation of the public and key stakeholders for the uniqueness of the Yampa River and the endangered fish.

Task: Write and disseminate news releases, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor on the purpose, activities, accomplishments and status of the Yampa Plan, including NEPA coordination, using freelance writers on contract where appropriate. Op-ed pieces and letters to the editor will be authored by key opinion makers in the valley.

The Yampa River Coordinator worked with the Recovery Program's I&E coordinator in developing new releases concerning the Yampa Plan. He also provided input to the Partnership for public notices, meeting agendas, issues statements, etc.

Task: Investigate opportunities to educate school children about the Yampa River ecosystem and its importance to the endangered fish through the River Watch program, Project Wild, or other existing programs.

No work was accomplished under this task in FY 2000.

Task: Educate key stakeholders and local officials concerning significant issues and resources via a guided float trip through Yampa Canyon.

The Recovery Program sponsored a guided float trip through the Yampa Canyon with the cooperation of Dinosaur National Monument. The Yampa River Coordinator invited interested agencies/individuals from the basin to educate them about the importance of the Yampa River to the endangered fishes and to listen to their issues and concerns with regard to future water development within the basin. Other members of the Recovery Program also were invited to attend and learn more about the ongoing planning process for the Yampa River Basin.

Objective: Effectively involve the public in the planning process.

Task: Conduct public meetings to provide information and obtain input on the Yampa Plan. Incorporate public input when formulating alternatives for the Yampa Plan.

In FY 2000 the public was informed and encouraged to participate in developing a management plan for the Yampa River. A Cooperative Agreement to implement the plan as a federal action will be subject to both NEPA and ESA Section 7. When a final draft of the management plan is completed in FY 2001, formal public meetings will be scheduled to solicit additional public input pursuant to the NEPA.

Objective: Enhance the image of the FWS and the Recovery Program in the eyes of the public and key stakeholders as a credible entity to develop the Yampa Plan in a timely and responsible manner.

Task: The FWS Yampa Coordinator or representative should regularly attend County Commissioner, Craig City Council, and Yampa River Basin Partnership meetings to report on the Yampa Plan and identify concerns. Concerns should be addressed in a timely and straightforward manner.

Gerry Roehm attended most regular meetings of the Partnership in FY 2000. He provided status reports on the progress of Yampa Plan development and addressed questions and concerns from members of the Partnership, as well as those of Potentially Affected Interests, in a candid and timely manner.

Objective: Increase support in the water, scientific and environmental community for the Yampa Plan.

Task: Presentations at professional meetings and conferences emphasizing the dual objectives of the Yampa Plan (i.e., water for people and water for fish). Submit articles about the Yampa Plan for publication in environmental and water group newsletters.

The Yampa River Coordinator briefed the Program's Management and Biology committees on the status of the Yampa planning process, beginning with an outline for a management plan in November 1999, and concluding with a presentation of augmentation water supply alternatives prior to the August facilitated meeting. Prior to the August meeting, the *Craig Daily Press* published an article about the Yampa Plan, encouraging broader public participation in the planning process. The Yampa River Coordinator also participated in the float trip in June 2000, during which he presented a status report on the Yampa planning process.

- VII. Recommendations: There is general consensus both within the Recovery Program and the local community that we develop a plan for the Yampa River to promote recovery of the listed fishes while water development continues in accordance with State law and interstate compacts. Although most stakeholders are in favor of the plan (and subsequent PBO), their participation in the process is due more to the mandates of the ESA than to any philosophical commitment to the recovery of endangered fishes. They believe this is something they must do in exchange for certainty that they can develop their water resources without regulatory interference from FWS. Some water users in the Yampa River Basin believe they are being held accountable for impacts to endangered fishes outside their control, such as those due to Flaming Gorge Dam and nonnative fishes. While the fishes may not be endangered due to the actions of water users in the Yampa Basin, their actions can play a pivotal role in their recovery.

Therefore, it is especially important to disseminate the following message to all of the stakeholders regarding the value of the Yampa River to the recovery of the endangered fishes:

*The influence of the Yampa extends well beyond its hydrologic boundaries. It provides spawning habitat for razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow which disperse throughout the Green, White and Yampa rivers, and it contributes spring flows otherwise absent from the Green River which are critical to maintaining fish nursery habitats downstream from the confluence. Conversely, fish reared in Green River nurseries disperse back to the Yampa as adults.*

It is questionable whether most stakeholders will ever embrace the value of these and other native species. Their reason for wishing to recover the species is purely pragmatic --to delist the fish so they will no longer be an impediment to development. This view is short-sighted in that recovery and delisting cannot be achieved without some certainty that the needs of the fishes will be met in the future. Even those who value these fishes believe they have been good stewards and resent the interference of state and federal government in developing their water resources consistent with state law and interstate compacts. Education is the key, beginning in the schools, but extending out into the adult population, as well.

- VIII. Project status: The project currently is ongoing. It was expected to be completed in FY 2000. However, we now expect the management plan to be completed early in FY 2001, after which the PBO will be drafted pursuant to a Section 7 consultation on the plan. In addition, public meetings will be scheduled at several locations in the basin to present the plan and offer the public an opportunity to submit comments on the plan and provide scoping input for the NEPA process. An environmental assessment and PBO for the plan should be completed by mid to late FY 2001, after which we would enter the implementation phase of this project. At that time the Public Involvement Plan may be modified, as necessary, or discontinued. Until that time, however, it will be important to engage all interested parties to encourage their participation in the continued development and acceptance of an effective and implementable management plan for the Yampa River Basin.

IX. FY 2000 public involvement budget (Recovery Program funds only):

- A. Funds provided: \$1,000
- B. Funds expended: \$1,000
- C. Difference: \$0

X. Submitted by: Gerry Roehm  
Date: December 13, 2000